



Editorial: EPA urgency on Bridgeton should be felt at West Lake Landfill



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After taking matters into their own hands by conducting radiation soil tests of questionable scientific value, the residents of Bridgeton have succeeded in galvanizing the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Karl Brooks, director of the EPA's Region 7, covering Kansas, Missouri, Iowa and Nebraska, said EPA would bring in testing equipment and a team of experts to Bridgeton. Once and for all, it should be determined whether there are excessive levels of radiation on the ball fields at the

city of Bridgeton's athletic complex.

On Friday, Mr. Brooks said unequivocally that there is no reason to doubt the safety of the soil on the fields. Tests by the Army Corps of Engineers in 2005 and last year by the Missouri Department of Natural Resources found no excessive levels of radiation at the site.

But Mr. Brooks said he does not dismiss the safety concerns of parents who are afraid to use the fields in case there is contamination, or of area residents and property owners. That's why the EPA is taking the time and going to the expense to conduct proper testing.

Two weeks ago, a group of Bridgeton residents used a \$16,000 radiation detector donated by an attorney suing the owners of the West Lake Landfill to test the soil. The landfill, where radioactive material was dumped decades ago, is less than a mile from the athletic complex. Despite reassurances from federal and state agencies that the radiation has not migrated off the site, residents, workers and visitors to the area are concerned.

The group that did the testing said a spike of gamma radiation was found in one soil sample. Those tests are being analyzed in a lab in Wisconsin and by the EPA.

Now that area residents have the EPA's attention in a significant way — Mr. Brooks told the Post-Dispatch editorial board on Friday that the West Lake Landfill issue is “the most challenging remediation problem we have” — they should press their other concerns.

The most important issue facing the agency is what to do with the radioactive waste.

The waste has been there for decades but did not get a lot of attention until odors from the Bridgeton Landfill became intense, and the fire began smoldering underground.

Among the proposals for dealing with the problem are excavating the site and shipping the waste to appropriate storage sites in the far west, or encapsulating it and leaving it on the site.

Mr. Brooks said that without scientific data to determine what is best, his agency cannot order Republic Services, owner of the landfills, what to do.

We agree that the science must guide the final solution, but let's get on with it. It's time to resolve this significant issue of public concern. As the EPA moves to clear the air about radiation in ball fields, it should pick up its pace in making a final decision on what to do with the radioactive material in the West Lake Landfill.